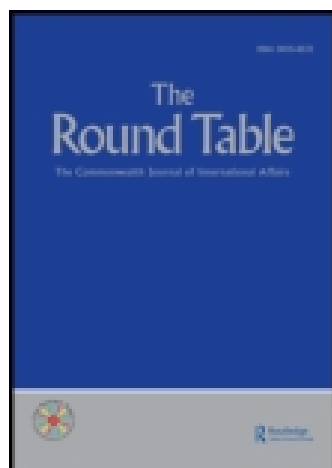


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'Mutual Hurting Stalemates', 'Ripe Moments' and Third-party Intervention: Implications for the 'Southern Cameroons' Restoration of Statehood' Conflict

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‘Mutual Hurting Stalemates’, ‘Ripe Moments’ and Third-party Intervention: Implications for the ‘Southern Cameroons’ Restoration of Statehood’ Conflict

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores ex-British Southern Cameroons’ restoration of independence and statehood conflict with the Republic of Cameroon from the perspective of Zartman’s ‘mutual hurting stalemates’ and ‘ripe moments’ framework in the timing of peace initiatives by third-party interveners. In analysing the conflict, the argument in the article is that powerful third parties need to use their power to intervene in deep-rooted conflicts whether or not they are violent, because violent or not, such conflicts remain destructive. The article traces the conflict from the independence-by-joining concept of the United Nations against the background of the incompatibility theory of plural societies. It provides an exploration of the dynamics involved in Zartman’s framework, including its criticisms. The discussion of the implications of the concept highlights the vested interests of international mediating powers in play in international mediations, especially in post-colonial settings involving power imbalance between the conflict parties. In situations such as the Southern Cameroons’ restoration of independence and statehood conflict with no open war and thousands of casualties, refugee flows and visible material destruction, the article questions whether the ‘mutual hurting stalemates’ and ‘ripe moment’ concept may not be a rationalisation for inaction.*

KEY WORDS: Southern Cameroons, nationalism, conflict, third-party intervention, restoration of statehood, peace initiatives, post-colonial conflicts, Zartman, independence-by-joining

Introduction

Scholars who care about war and peace issues should care about the causes and consequences of nationalistic and ethnic conflicts. Policymakers who have responsibilities for international security should care deeply about these problems as well. (Brown, 2001, p. xi)

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In correspondence with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, Vincent Feko (2005), Secretary General of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), called upon ‘the World body to act now’. He stated that ‘The time is now opportune for a United Nations Peace Keeping Mission to be put in place in Southern Cameroons if a cataclysm of uncontrollable proportions is to be averted between Southern Cameroons and *La Republique du Cameroun*’ (Vincent Feko, 2005, p. 1). In addition to this call, the recent clash on the floor of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva (Yongbang, 2005), the proceedings of the 37th Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights in Banjul, The Gambia (Gumne, 2005), and the Agenda Item ‘Peaceful Conflict Resolution in Africa: Model of the Bakassi Crisis’ (EX CL/495 (XIV) Add6) sponsored by La Republique du Cameroun (Republic of Cameroon) and rejected from the Agenda for the African Union (AU) Summit of 1 February 2009, are some indicators of the current state of the conflict between former British Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroun. With the experiences of Rwanda (1994) and Darfur (2003 to present), one would think that the United Nations (UN) would intervene to avert a similar situation within the context of preventive diplomacy or other relevant policy, but the World organisation preferred to ‘commend the Chairman and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) for the non-violent approach adopted in their efforts to seek the resolution of the issues’ (Gambari, 2007). Is the UN simply waiting for a moment said to be the ‘ripe moment’?

This paper analyses the ‘Southern Cameroons’ restoration of statehood’ struggle from the perspective of Zartman’s (2001, pp. 8–18) concept of ‘mutual hurting stalemates’ and ‘ripe moments’ in the timing of peace initiatives. In analysing the conflict, it is argued that powerful third parties need to use their power to intervene in deep-rooted conflicts whether or not they are violent because such conflicts remain destructive. Although the concept of ‘ripeness’ was primarily derived from military situations between parties in a conflict (Kleiboer, 1994, p. 110), the basis of this argument is that violence should not be necessary before the world community intervenes in a conflict in the pursuit of peace within and between its member states. From the ripeness perspective, the paper also argues that the United Nations ought not to wait for ‘ripe moments’ from the standpoint of its principles of preventive diplomacy in order to avert humanitarian disasters. The 1994 Rwandan genocide in Africa is an example of a case where the international community remained aloof while the situation degenerated with drastic consequences (Fleischer, 2005). To appreciate fully this analysis, it may be useful to understand how the ‘two Cameroons’ came together through a UN-sponsored ‘independence-by-joining’ concept.

Independence-by-joining, Incompatibility Theory and Plural Societies

The ‘two Cameroons’, formerly separate Class ‘B’ United Nations trust territories brought together by a UN-sponsored independence-by-joining in 1960, have experienced conflict since 1961 (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; Fossung, 2004; Anyangwe, 2004, 2008). Since October 1961, the year of the UN-sponsored independence-by-joining, the people of the two territories have been locked in conflict over the desire and action of the Republic of Cameroon to annex and assimilate ex-British Cameroons. This conflict had been foreseen. Ambassador Clement J. Zabloski (1959) of the United States, for example, had warned at the

896th Session of the United Nations General Assembly that 'a hurried choice imposed on the population of the Trust Territory of the Southern Cameroons would be catastrophic for their political future'. Similarly, Williard Johnson (1970), in his study of the Cameroon union in its early years, predicted that

the mere existence of two states and the juxtaposition of their officials in the institutions of the federation was an inadequate guarantee of the cultural and moral equality of the two communities, because French influence in the commercial, administrative, and cultural life of East Cameroon was too overwhelming and the East too dominant in the affairs of the Federation to secure such equality.

In addition to these predictions, Woodrow Wilson (1919) and the proponents of the incompatibility theory in plural societies such as Mill (1972) and M. G. Smith (1986) have argued against putting together within one state people with different cultures, languages and religions.

No sooner did the United Nations impose 'independence-by-joining' on ex-British Southern Cameroons than the Republic of Cameroon began a process to destroy completely the governing institutions of Southern Cameroons, and to annex the territory (Nzefeh, 1994; Fanzo, 1999; Anyangwe, 2004). The ensuing conflict, although apparently non-manifest mainly owing to Southern Cameroons' use of non-violent means of struggle (Nfor, 2002), has increasingly been very costly to both sides in political, economic and developmental terms, as will be discussed in this paper.

Unable to cause constitutional reforms toward any form of autonomy, which would safeguard its cultural, historical and legal identity within the Republic of Cameroon, and suffering several forms of human rights abuses in the country (Dinka, 1985; Mukong, 1990; All Anglophone Conference, 1993; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; Anyangwe, 2000, 2004; US Department of State, 2004; Verdzekov, 2005; Amnesty International, 2008), Southern Cameroons nationalist movements began a process in 1993 to correct the injustice done to the territory at independence by the United Kingdom (Trusteeship Administering Authority) and the United Nations (Trusteeship Supervising Authority) by seeking to restore its identity and autonomy. The Trusteeship Agreement, it will be underscored, required the Administering Authority to nurture the people for self-government in accordance with Article 76(b) of the UN Charter. The process to correct the injustice in 1961 has led to an outright demand for 'the restoration of independence and sovereignty' for the territory (Ebong, 1999). This urge by Southern Cameroons people to 'restore the independence and statehood of Southern Cameroons' from an existing state (Republic of Cameroon) has escalated the conflict further considering 'the jealous nature of the world of nations' (A. D. Smith, 1986, p. 223). The argument in this analysis will be clearer if we understand Zartman's 'mutual hurting stalemates' and 'ripe moments' framework in conflict and peace studies.

Zartman's 'Mutual Hurting Stalemates' and 'Ripe Moments' Framework

In his article, 'The timing of peace initiatives: hurting stalemates and ripe moments', I. William Zartman (2001) states that 'Parties resolve their conflict only when they

are ready to do so—when alternative usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament. At that moment they grab on to proposals that usually have been in the air for a long time and that only now appear attractive'. In this theory, Zartman (2001, p. 8) focuses attention on a particular moment that he considers 'ripe' because the parties perceive a 'Mutually Hurting Stalemate' (MHS), one wherein the parties 'find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them ... then they seek an alternative policy or way out' (2001, p. 8). The Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado (1998, p. 1) likens the concept of 'ripeness' to the situation of a fruit by indicating that 'If a fruit is picked too early, it will not be ready for eating; however, if it is picked too late, it will be inedible as well'. As developed by Zartman, the concept of 'ripeness' and 'mutual hurting stalemates' has theoretical bases in cost-benefit analysis and game theory.

As parties to the conflict under study, Southern Cameroons nationalist movements have shown interest in pursuing a negotiated outcome. For example, Southern Cameroons nationalist movements including the SCNC, Southern Cameroons Peoples Organisation (SCAPO), Ambazonia Restoration Council (ARC), or Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM) have all sued for dialogue in several forms and at several institutions and organisations (Gambari, 2007, p. 1). These appeals for a negotiated settlement include several memoranda to the government of the Republic of Cameroon, including: the 1994 Bamenda Proclamation; the Buea Peace Initiative (BPI) modelled after the Czech-Slovak model; and several other appeals and petitions to multilateral organisations, especially the UN, the AU, the Commonwealth, the European Union (EU) and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO). In these different efforts, the respective nationalist movements have called upon the different organisations to intervene in the conflict (Elad, 1995; Foncha, 1996; Yongbang, 1997; Nfor, 2002; Busdachin, 2005; Feko, 2005). Lately, Southern Cameroons nationalist movements have also proceeded with law suits filed, respectively, in Cameroon at the High Court of Bamenda (Judgment HCB/28/92 of 18 May 1992), in Nigeria at the Federal High Court in Abuja with a ruling on 5 March 2002, at the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, and at the African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (Communication Nos 266/2003 and 377) in Banjul, The Gambia. These different actions by Southern Cameroons nationalist movements are based on the thinking that a peaceful settlement is not only possible, but also more beneficial than the human, financial and material costs of an independence war.

In spite of these different efforts deployed by the ex-British Cameroons side, the government of La Republique du Cameroun has scarcely shown any interest in addressing the conflict. Apart from appearing as defendants at the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva and at the African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (Communication Nos 266/2003 and 377/2009) in Banjul, The Gambia, the Cameroon Government does not seem to have devoted any particular attention to the conflict. Neither of the two presidents of the Republic of Cameroon in 50 years (1961–2010) of the post-colonial conflict made a policy statement on the conflict. The consequence of the silent repression of the conflict by the Cameroon Government only meant increasing escalation of the conflict. From a timid

opposition to the 1972 attempts to 'unify' the country from a two-state federation, Southern Cameroons nationalist movements have progressed through the demand for a new social order in Cameroon by Gorgi Dinka (Mukong, 1990, pp. 93–106) and the proposal to return to the initial two-state federation (Elad *et al.*, 1992) to the outright desire to 'restore the independence and statehood of ex-British Southern Cameroons' (Ebong, 1999, p. 1). The current discussions among the nationalist movements hinting at the failure of the non-violent approach known as the 'force of argument' policy of the struggle indicate that some Southern Cameroons people became impatient with the non-intervention of third parties, including the failure of conflict analysts and/or conflict resolution practitioners to create ripeness (Rubin, 1991; Salla, 1997). Rather than considering some form of intervention in the half-a-century-long conflict, the United Nations only 'commended the Southern Cameroons National Council for the non-violent approach adopted in the efforts for seeking resolution of the issues' (Gambari, 2007, p. 1). As the Southern Cameroons restoration movements hint at resorting to violence to free their territory from the Republic of Cameroon, it may be useful to consider the implications of Zartman's 'ripe moments' theory to the conflict.

Zartman (2001) associates a number of elements with the ripe moment theory. As he stated, 'finding the ripe moment requires research and intelligence studies to identify the objective and subjective elements' (2001, p. 9). These elements include, 'Subjective expressions of pain, impasse, and inability to bear the cost of further escalation, related to objective evidence of stalemate, data on numbers and nature of casualties and material costs, and/or other such indicators of MHS, along with expressions of a sense of a Way Out'. A third factor suggested by Zartman is the presence of spokespersons for both sides. All in all, Zartman and the other proponents of ripeness, including Richard Hass (1998, p. 232) and Stephen Stedman (1991, p. 254), 'agree that the ripeness of conflicts refers to a particular moment in the course of a dispute when circumstances are most conducive to conflict management by an outside actor' (Kleiboer, 1994, p. 110). In considering Zartman's framework within the context of the Southern Cameroons' restoration of statehood conflict in the Republic of Cameroon, the question remains: When will the time be 'ripe' for intervention? An understanding of this analysis requires a brief discussion of the Southern Cameroons' restoration of independence conflict.

The Southern Cameroons' Restoration of Statehood Conflict

In document E/CN4/2005/NGO/253 dated 8 March 2005, under the title 'The Rights of Peoples to Self-determination and Its Application to Peoples under Colonial or Alien Domination or Foreign Occupation', the people of the former UN trust territory of Southern Cameroons under United Kingdom administration presented their case to break free from the Republic of Cameroon. Submitted to the United Nations Security Council, this document contains several arguments that provide the basis for the conflict from the perspective of the people of ex-British Cameroons. They argue that they are entitled to their own independent and sovereign state because denial of their right to self-determination is a betrayal of UNGA Resolution 1514 of 1960 and the UN Charter in its Article 76(B). Ex-British Southern Cameroons nationalist movements also cite the provisions of UN Resolution 1803

(XV111), which focus on the rights of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources for their collective welfare and development.

The document referenced E/CN4/2005/NGO/253 expresses regret that Southern Cameroons people have since lost control over their destiny, land and natural resources. It further states that 'the people have been reduced to tenants on their own land and the resources of their land are exploited and managed for the exclusive development and benefit of the Republic of Cameroon'. That document also blames the woes of Southern Cameroons from the time the United Nations sponsored independence-by-joining a former separate trust territory, La Republique du Cameroun. Advancing a series of reasons why the union of the 'two Cameroons' failed, the document holds the United Nations responsible for not implementing Resolution 1608 of 21 April 1961, which called for a post-plebiscite conference to work out modalities of the union. The same document concludes by calling on the United Nations to, as a matter of urgency, look into the Southern Cameroons' petition for independence and sovereignty in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

The 'Southern Cameroons' restoration of statehood' conflict, though longstanding and seemingly deep-rooted, has not made news headlines. Consequently, it is almost unknown and uninvestigated by scholars in conflict and peace studies. Although the conflict is very similar in history to the cases of East Timor, Eritrea, Western Sahara and Namibia, very little or no scholarly attention has been given to the conflict. This situation can be explained by three main reasons. First, unlike the cases of East Timor, Eritrea and Namibia, the people of Southern Cameroons opted to use non-violence as their weapon of struggle. The slogan of the struggle, 'The force of argument, not the argument of force', does not seem to have been significant in a world where conflict intensity is measured by the number of casualties and extent of material destruction. Second, the Republic of Cameroon, the other major party in the conflict, has succeeded over the decades in suppressing the conflict using every available power at the disposal of a sovereign state (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). The third reason is the imperial order of state actors who generally do not support the right of independent statehood for groups within existing states (A. D. Smith, 1986; Mayall, 1992; Leff, 1999), even if such groups 'present claims to distinctive language, culture, territory and other attributes of nation states' (Banks, 1996, p. 135). In spite of the reluctance of international actors to support assertions of self-determination, history has shown that the desire for determining one's own destiny, developed from the 18th and 19th centuries (Hannum, 1990, p. 27), is especially strong for those who are victims of injustices and oppression, and have a sense of their own distinctiveness (Jeong, 2000, p. 225). In illustrating this fact of history with recent cases, Ho-Wong Jeong notes that

In the aftermath of WWI, independence was granted to linguistic and other cultural minorities dissatisfied with political boundaries that were drawn across the landscapes of disintegrating Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires as well as the European segments of Russia. The victorious countries used the principle of self-determination to legitimize the division of defeated countries with the creation of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Finland, Poland, and the Baltic States.

While Poland and Finland remain intact as states, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Baltic States have disintegrated into different independent states. Many colonial states in Africa gained independence in accordance with UN Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 (Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples). Some, such as Namibia, Eritrea, Western Sahara and British Cameroons, were not granted their independence and sovereignty. The Southern Cameroons' conflict can be viewed from this broad perspective.

To this end, it may be important to discuss any channels that ex-British Southern Cameroons' people, referred to in the Republic of Cameroon as 'Anglophones', have had to express themselves beyond the nationalist movements. It is worth indicating that Southern Cameroons' people have almost no other channels in the Republic of Cameroon to express their aspirations. First, the current Constitution, the 1996 Constitution, does not recognise the dual colonial heritage of post-colonial Cameroon Republic. It does not just deny Anglophones minority rights, but does not even mention them. Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) have indicated that the systematic marginalisation of Anglophones and their institutions only seems to radicalise further this community through groups such as the SCNC.

Second, when, benefiting from the advent of 'democratisation' and multiparty politics in Cameroon Republic in the 1990s, Anglophones sought recognition and representation by proposing a return to the pre-1972 federation, they were chased away from the Owona Constitution Reform Committee and no concessions were made to them in any way. Third, it would appear that Anglophones (Southern Cameroons people) can belong to political parties or form political parties, but recognised political parties in Cameroon Republic are not allowed to raise 'Anglophone problems' or to include 'the Anglophone problem' in their manifestoes and discussions.

Some groups may have tried to influence the future of Anglophones in Cameroon Republic in their own ways. The most notable of these groups was the Social Democratic Front (SDF), an opposition political party led by John Fru Ndi. An Anglophone-based opposition party, the SDF became the main opposition party in Cameroon Republic, and played a pivotal role in the return to multiparty politics in general and the 1992 Presidential elections in particular. However, in spite of the influence of the party in the context of Cameroon politics, Fru Ndi's party could not include the Anglophone situation in its mission and vision for the country. Some observers have suggested that Fru Ndi and his SDF might have affected the future of 'Anglophones' in Cameroon Republic if he had been successful in taking power from the results of the 1992 elections, which he allegedly won, but this remained only speculative. In the October 2011 Presidential elections, another Anglophone-led party, the People's Action Party (PAP) of Justice Paul Abine Ayah, also made major gains in the Anglophone Southwest region of the country, but without any special agenda for 'Anglophones'. In other words, although some opposition political parties in Cameroon Republic were founded by 'Anglophones', including the SDF, they do not and cannot officially speak for 'Anglophones'.

Besides political parties in the country, the issues of co-opting people of Southern Cameroons' origin in government have remained central in Cameroon politics since the 1961 'reunification' of British and French Cameroons. From Foncha's position as Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, people of ex-British

Southern Cameroons have been co-opted in different top political positions in the governments of the Republic of Cameroon. They include Solomon Tandeng Muna and Lawrence Shang Fonka as Speakers of the National Assembly, and Simon Achidi Achu, Peter Mafany Musonge, Ephraim Inoni and Philemon Yang as Prime Ministers at different times. This policy of co-optation, some observers believe, aims at giving the impression that the people of former British Southern Cameroons are full participants in governance. Southern Cameroons nationalist groups refute these claims and refer to the respective leaders as self-serving individuals who represent only themselves because they were never elected by the people of Southern Cameroons as their representatives in the governments of the Republic of Cameroon. Like the political parties, the Anglophone personalities co-opted in government did not represent 'Anglophones' and cannot speak for 'Anglophones'. Co-optation remains an important strategy in Cameroon politics, which benefits exclusively the Presidents of Cameroon who have co-opted the individuals to do their bidding in much the same way as the Hebrew Governors and foremen in Pharaoh's Egypt.

In the broader political context of the Republic of Cameroon, Southern Cameroons' nationalist movements, regarded by some as separatist groups and by others as secessionist movements, seem to be the only channel for articulating 'Anglophone' interests in the Republic of Cameroon. The nationalist groups can be viewed as playing an important role in fighting the cause of Southern Cameroons through different cases and petitions to relevant international organisations as well as mobilising Anglophones for their cause. In its 2009 judgment in Communication 266/2003, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) in Banjul, The Gambia, not only, for example, recognised the territory as a people with rights, but also recommended its good offices in mediating a political dialogue between the Republic of Cameroon and ex-British Southern Cameroons. The nationalist groups have further radicalised their position through Communication 377/2009 at the African Commission, requesting the Commission to make La Republique du Cameroun withdraw from its occupation of Southern Cameroons' territory to its borders at independence in accordance with Article 4 of the African Union Constitutive Act.

In analysing this conflict, it can be argued that the authorities of the Republic of Cameroon have been very unwilling to admit publicly the existence of the conflict (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997, p. 219). As mentioned earlier, neither of the two Presidents of the country, in half a century, made a public statement on the conflict. The different leaders of the Republic of Cameroon have rather focused mainly on an integrationist agenda, which represents for Southern Cameroons 'annexation and colonisation' (Anyangwe, 2004, 2008). Popular opinion in Cameroon is that the leadership of the Republic of Cameroon fears that a negotiated outcome to the conflict would be a recipe for the disintegration of present-day Republic of Cameroon. The leadership of the Republic of Cameroon also fears, it is alleged, that a negotiated outcome would mean less power and authority for the Republic of Cameroon to exercise complete control over the territory and its huge oil resources, which account for about 70% of the country's wealth. Given that the leadership of the Republic of Cameroon has always considered these costs as outweighing any benefits of a negotiated outcome, the leadership has, since 1961, resorted mainly to

repression and divide-and-conquer tactics (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; Anyangwe, 2004; Gumne, 2005). In the face of such fear of losing and in the wake of escalating conflict, it is important to consider a 'way out'.

'Way Out' in the Southern Cameroons Nationalism Conflict

In the wake of the 2005 killings of Southern Cameroons students by armed forces of the Republic of Cameroon at the University of Buea in Southern Cameroons, a Southern Cameroons' activist, Joseph Che (2005, p. 3), expressed the following frustration in a local newspaper:

How else can a people be pushed to the wall? Protesting Students in the Republic of Cameroon get attention and promises to see into their crisis, while their counterparts of Southern Cameroons are showered with bullets, insults, and assaults. Haven't we had enough of this? Why is the world so blind to this, are they waiting for the Great Lakes happenings, before they can act?

The frustration of this activist leads me to ask the following questions: When will the moment be considered ripe for third-party intervention? What is the 'Way Out'?

Zartman (2001) refers to the 'Way Out' as a sense that a negotiated solution is possible for the searching and that the other party shares that sense and the willingness to search too. The scholar further asserts that 'without the sense of a Way Out, the push associated with Mutual Hurting Stalemates would leave the parties with nowhere to go' Zartman (2001, p. 9). The 'Way Out' in the Southern Cameroons conflict remains unclear as the parties remain entrenched in their positions. The Republic of Cameroon continues to use the weapons of a state actor: (1) to prevent any recognition of the conflict, and possible third-party intervention; and (2) to repress and oppress the people of Southern Cameroons who have since been denied existence as a people, and reduced to two provinces of La Republique du Cameroun (Anyangwe, 2004). On the other hand, the people of Southern Cameroons remain determined to achieve self-determination as an inalienable right (Fossung, 2004; Anyangwe, 2008). While the conflict simmers, third parties, mainly multinational organisations such as the United Nations, the African Union and the Commonwealth, and also powerful nations such as the United States, Britain and Germany, continue to look away from the situation. This attitude of these organisations and the big powers does not, however, appear as a surprise. Scholars of world politics offer some reasons. James Mayall (1992), for example, opines that 'sovereignty norms and the status quo bias of most international actors militate against the encouragement of reconstructing states'. Arguing in similar light, Carol Leff (1999, p. 22) points out that 'state dissolution and reconstruction are relatively rare events in the modern state system'. This position notwithstanding, Jeong (2000, p. 228) observes that 'the assertions of self-determination have been more easily accepted by the international community mainly when the demand of the people was consistent with the geopolitical interests of great powers'.

Indeed, the situation involving ex-British Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon is one of a stalemate where there is no war and no peace but where the country barely exists as a political entity (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; Fanso,

1999). While the political leadership of the country is unwilling to admit the existence of a liberation conflict, Southern Cameroons is working on several fronts toward its independence. After this discussion of ripeness and mutual hurting stalemates on the Southern Cameroons liberation struggle from the standpoints of cost–benefit analysis and game theory, let us turn to the implications of Zartman’s theory of ripe moments in conflict intervention.

Implications of Ripeness Theory to the Southern Cameroons’ Conflict

The fruit analogy suggested by the University of Colorado Conflict Research Consortium appears very apt, especially when applied to natural phenomena. However, the ‘ripe moment’ concept may not be so straightforward in social phenomena such as conflicts where ‘inherent or naturally occurring’ ripeness may be different from ‘created’ ripeness (Rubin, 1991). While accepting Zartman’s theory as a valid concept in conflict studies (Rubin, 1991), several questions have been advanced by critics of the theory. Kriesberg (1991), for example, has advanced concerns with errors of timing. Rubin (1991) has also argued that the concepts of ‘timing’ and ‘ripeness’ are highly subjective in nature. While he conceives of multiple moments rather than just one, he cautions about attempting de-escalation too soon (when there is not yet sufficient motivation by either party to negotiate) or too late (when parties are already highly motivated to stick to extreme, well-publicised, entrenched positions). Similarly, Rubin cautions against the delusion of the right moment wherein ripeness is misused for procrastination. In addition, Kleiboer (1994) also considers the subjective dimensions of ripeness as problematic, and rather makes a claim for research on the timing of third-party intervention to focus mainly on the willingness of the parties to negotiate. The key question to Kleiboer is mainly ‘what influences willingness and how can it be brought about?’ In conflict situations such as the ‘Southern Cameroons’ restoration of independence’ conflict, one may question the logic behind waiting for casualties to pile up before the conscience of the world community is pricked, as was the case in Darfur between 2003 and 2005. I argue in agreement with Kleiboer that the ripeness dimensions in social phenomena can be subjective and can also be dependent upon the interest motivations of third-party interveners.

In the article ‘Creating the ripe moment in the East Timor conflict’, Michael Salla (1997, pp. 65–83) asks the following pertinent question: ‘What is the correct mix of “objective” and “subjective” conditions that make up the “ripe moment” and lead to perceptions of a “mutually hurting stalemate”?’ Zartman’s (1995, p. 18) work provides an answer, which can be explored in the context of the Southern Cameroons restoration of independence and statehood conflict. The ‘ripe moment’ for Zartman refers to ‘an inclusive victory, an inconclusive defeat, a bloody standoff that suddenly brings cost home, a loss of foreign support or an increase in foreign pressure ... all accompanied by a new perception of the possibility of a negotiated solution’. This answer notwithstanding, Michael Salla (1997, p. 451) asserts that ‘there is great difficulty in elite perceptions of the objective conditions that lead to a mutually hurting stalemate’. This viewpoint can be applied to several cases of conflict where there is power imbalance between the parties. In many cases, third-party interveners simply have looked in the other direction while the party with less power has made

request after request for third-party intervention. The case of ex-British Cameroons is one example where the nationalist movements have unsuccessfully appealed for intervention for many decades. Some critics of ex-British Cameroons' nationalism struggle point to Frantz Fanon's (1967) argument that colonialism, being inherently violent, can be dismantled only through violent means.

The difficulty in providing straightforward answers to the questions related to the theory and practice of ripeness in social conflict has led scholars and practitioners to identify a number of insights for positioning, and pre-negotiation strategies necessary for applying the theory. The insights identified include: becoming an indispensable channel for negotiation; creating the willingness of the parties to negotiate; establishing an acceptable mechanism for negotiation and an appropriate format for registering an agreement; identifying the parties to be involved in the settlement; identifying the issues to be resolved, and separating out non-resolvable issues; airing alternatives to current conflict course; clarifying costs and risks involved in seeking settlement; and establishing reciprocity. Even then, Zartman (2001, p. 15) acknowledges the difficulty involved as he recognises that 'none of these things is easy to do, nor are they done quickly' and that 'since ripeness results from a combination of objective and subjective elements, both need attention'. In regard to ex-British Cameroons' independence struggle, the question may be asked whether anyone in the international community pays attention and whether the nationalist movements themselves are doing anything to attract such attention to their cause.

Third-party Intervention in an International Context

The problematic nature of 'ripe moments' becomes even more complex in an international context such as the ex-British Cameroons conflict, which may be viewed by the leadership of La Republique du Cameroun as an internal affair and as an international conflict by the leadership of ex-British Cameroons' nationalist movements. International mediation scholar Jacob Bercovitch (2005, p. 99) has observed that third-party intervention in the international context is not altogether 'a benevolent act exclusively performed in the interest of the parties to the respective conflicts'. According to Bercovitch, the vested interests of international interveners or mediators pollute international relations, and this may be a key to understanding the intractability of many conflicts. Bercovitch (1996, p. 4) also presents the strong argument that 'Whether individuals, organizations, or states, these (international) interveners enter a conflict system to ... passively or assertively, promote or protect any interests they may have'. In examining the role, relevance, and contribution of the efforts by individuals, nation-states and international organisations to address resistant conflicts, Jacob Bercovitch (2005, p. 99) has attributed to the mediation of conflicts the 'characteristics of international relations', where states have become aware from the experience of the World Wars that the 'interests of the state are constantly involved in important ways with events far afield' (Kennan, 1951, p. 3).

When we consider international mediation and international negotiation as acts of international politics, the views of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (1998, p. 51) are relevant for this discussion. This scholar and practitioner has emphasised, from the standpoint of American foreign policy, that 'the goals of American foreign policy, namely to ensure the continued security, prosperity, and

freedom of Americans, have not changed in more than 200 years'. George Kennan (1951), before her, articulated the same interests of a sovereign state, when he pointed out how the United States was, by 1900, generally aware of the world-wide significance of its power, how the United States could be affected by events in far-off lands, and how 'from that time on, our interests were constantly involved in important ways with such events'. Indeed, President Jimmy Carter (1996, p. xi), a well-respected figure in international mediation efforts, has also subscribed to the same viewpoint in his reflections on his own actions in international mediation before April 2008. As he stated, 'In negotiations that I conducted as President and in my post-White House years, I tried to put myself in the place of foreign leaders and to imagine how they viewed their nation's interest'. These considerations were probably the underlying thinking when nations negotiated from the 19th century to map out boundaries of nations, or to alter such boundaries at the end of World War I. The same considerations were in play when the demise of the Soviet Union was negotiated in 1989, or during the 2008 international negotiations to grant independence to Kosovo.

In the majority of international interventions by third parties, whether the Dayton Agreements on the Balkans, the Oslo Accords on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the Abuja Agreements on Darfur, or the 2006 Greentree Accord over the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, the powerful third-party interveners were first and foremost concerned with their own nation's interests. Rubin (1991) has linked Henry Kissinger's mediation efforts between Israel and Syria after the 1973 Yom Kippur War to mediator interests. Similarly, the work of Webb *et al.* (1996) on the European Community in the Balkans amply provides other examples where international intervention was dictated by the domestic political considerations of the third-party intervening powers. National political considerations were equally in play when the Big Three (President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Stalin of Russia) negotiated the Yalta agreement at the end of World War II. As Kasperek and McDonough (2008, p. 220) put it, 'Backroom deals had already been constructed [when] Poland and other border countries and islands, were used as trade goods to seal arrangements'. Considering the history of US intervention in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict from 1988 mainly as 'a cycle of meaningless negotiations and harsh repression', some observers including Marco Rossi (2008) think the 'purpose of the Annapolis summit was to give the appearance of progress toward peace, while depicting Hamas as a spoiler to the process—even though they were excluded from the summit by Israel and the US—and thus provide a pretext for Israel to repress the people of Gaza further'.

Studies conducted by other scholars also indicate two major trends in international interventions. First, Mohammed O. Maundi *et al.* (2006, p. 175), studying international intervention in Africa, have pointed out that 'Prospective mediators are motivated by their own self-interests in either initiating entry, or accepting an invitation, to mediate'. During his visit to the Middle East in April 2008, President Carter (2008) reported that the Israeli government, for example, 'publicly rejected his request to meet with Israeli government officials' because the government presumed that he, Carter, would not be supportive of its continuing expansion of the 9,000 settlements being built, the imprisonment of 41 of the 43 Hamas candidates elected to the Palestinian Parliament from the West Bank, and other such repressive policies of the Israeli government.

Second, other studies argue that the vested interests of international mediating powers are always in play, 'even in the mediations undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations, the actor in international relations supposedly with claims to impartiality and neutrality' (Skjelsbaek and Fermann, 1996; Carnevale and Arad, 1996; Wehr and Lederach, 1996). In many cases, the international mediating powers paint undesired parties in a negative light to exclude them. Some cases in point include Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, where both groups are considered by Western governments as 'terrorist organisations', whereas Hamas and Hezbollah view themselves in the respective countries as the ones seeking liberation for their peoples. In the Palestinian–Israeli setting, Hamas is labelled by the West as a 'terrorist organisation' even after the 2006 election in which Hamas became the democratically elected government of the Palestinian people.

Similar examples can be found in other parts of the world. Many nationalist organisations in post-colonial settings are viewed negatively by major powers in international politics, often labelled negatively, and excluded from international mediation efforts in conflicts to which the respective liberation organisations are a party. Just as the African National Congress was, for several years, labelled negatively, and isolated, in the context of the apartheid government in South Africa, the November 2007 Sirte Talks in Libya did not include some groups in Darfur under the pretext of not legitimising them. The same was the case for many years with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in South Sudan, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in Ethiopian politics, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in South Africa, and the East Timorese liberation movement in Indonesia. The case is not different when we consider other cases such as Casamance in Senegal and Anjouan in the Comoros. Similarly, the Greentree mediation process over the Bakassi dispute did not include ex-British Cameroons' groups in spite of all the efforts the leadership of the territory's nationalist movements made to inform the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of the territory's historical and legal claims to Bakassi. Ex-British Cameroons of which Bakassi is a part has been involved in a struggle to restore its independence and sovereignty on the basis of the UN trusteeship agreement and the 1960 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the independence of colonial people, also known as UN Resolution 1514. In the context of this nationalist conflict, ex-British Southern Cameroons laying a claim to the Bakassi Peninsula sent a delegation to the ICJ, but the ICJ probably did not consider the delegation's interpleader in its judgment of October 2002.

In the context of global third-party interventions, and in view of the orphaning of some conflicts by the United Nations (Crocker *et al.*, 2005), including the Southern Cameroons' nationalism struggle, one could argue for a more vigorous role for the Commonwealth from a historical perspective considering Southern Cameroons as a former UN trusteeship under United Kingdom rule. The literature reviewed for this article did not indicate that Southern Cameroons' nationalist movements have aggressively pursued the United Kingdom to honour its trusteeship agreement obligations as well as its obligations regarding UN Resolution 1514 of 1960 on the independence of colonial peoples. Similarly, there was also no evidence of the positive action of the Commonwealth in intervening to defend the interests of Southern Cameroons' people as former subjects of the British Empire.

In addition to advocating for third-party intervention, Southern Cameroons' nationalist leaders would advance the cause of Anglophones if they gave prominence not only to the United Nations alone, but also to the channels of action of the Commonwealth and other multilateral organisations in terms of the nature of their interventions and the right of intervention. However, considering the record of third-party interveners in the international arena, it may be important to be cautious given that third-party mediation has often been linked more to the interests of international mediators and other third-party interveners than primarily focusing on the human rights and humanitarian needs of the people in conflict (Bercovitch, 1996). Subscribing to this viewpoint, Crocker *et al.* (2005, p. 21) have observed that 'the track record of third parties is not good' when considered in terms of third-party motives, strategic priorities, tradecraft and geopolitics.

Concluding Thoughts

In concluding this article, the 'ripe moment' concept, it would appear, may be in current consideration by the international community interveners as a rationalisation for inaction in some post-colonial conflicts such as the Southern Cameroons nationalism conflict where there has been no open war with thousands of casualties, refugee flows and material destruction. If the international community continues to wait passively for ripeness, as Rubin (1991) has argued, this waiting may constitute yet another error of judgment in an African conflict as the case was with the 1994 Rwandan genocide or the case of genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. Rather than procrastinating as the United Nations has often done (Goulding, 1997, p. 20), third-party interveners in positions of greater power ought to use their power to look for ways to create ripeness (Rubin, 1991). Creating ripeness can include external commitments, the introduction of third parties, and new ideas. To this end, I suggest in agreement with Rubin (1991) the need for creating negative incentives to negotiated settlement referred to as 'sticks' or positive incentives known as 'carrots' by inducing 'hurting stalemates' (impasses or deadlocks) that become so miserable that action is preferable to the status quo.

In whatever way we may consider the difficulties associated with Zartman's ripeness theory, Chester Crocker's (1993) approach from his experience in Angola appears to be very suitable for ex-British Cameroons' nationalist conflict. It is important, according to Crocker, from the perspective of the United States' policy of 'Constructive Engagement', for interveners to be 'present and available to the disputants while waiting for the moment to ripen, so as to be able to seize it when it occurs'. In the nearly half a century and more of the Southern Cameroons conflict (Fanso, 2009, pp. 141–150), no intervener(s) have been available even to the party that has requested third-party intervention, as evidenced by Vincent Feko's 2005 correspondence to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Subscribing to Crocker's argument, Schrodt *et al.* (2003) have pointed out that the presence of willing and resourceful mediators who possibly bring to the table concrete plans for getting out of the status quo situation fulfils the conditions that Zartman (2001) terms 'a way out'. This 'presence and availability' by the international community has been clearly absent in the Southern Cameroons 'restoration of statehood' conflict in the Republic of Cameroon. As Kleiboer (1994) has questioned, 'what will it take to influence the

willingness of third-party intervention and how can it be brought about? (p. 115)' To put it differently, how soon will there be a change of minds for the international community interveners to be 'present and available' in order to 'create' the ripe moment in the Southern Cameroons' restoration of independence conflict or to seize one when it occurs?

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